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THE MASTER PLAN OF SAN FRANCISCO

JOHN McLAREN PARK

A Report to the  
Board of Supervisors

*Dept. of City Planning*  
SAN FRANCISCO CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

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A Report to The Board of Supervisors

November 17, 1944

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Gardner A. Dailey, President

Herman Weinberger, Vice President  
(Deceased September 14, 1944)

Mrs. Charles B. Porter

George W. Johns

Michel D. Weill

J. Roger Deas, Secretary

L.   D e m i n g   T i l t o n ,   D i r e c t o r   o f   P l a n n i n g

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CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CITY PLANNING COMMISSION

DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING

ROOM 252., CITY HALL

GARDNER A. DAILEY, *President*  
HERMAN WEINBERGER, *Vice-President*  
GEORGE W. JOHNS  
MRS. CHARLES B. PORTER  
MICHEL D. WEILL  
L. DEMING TILTON, *Director of Planning*  
J. ROGER DEAS, *Secretary*

November 17, 1944

Honorable Board of Supervisors  
City and County of San Francisco  
San Francisco, California

Gentlemen:

We submit herewith a report on John McLaren Park as requested in your letter of September 12, 1944.

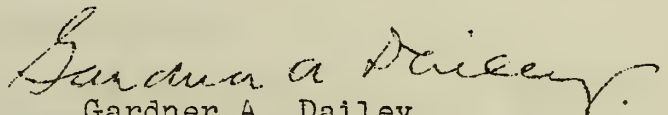
The differences in the estimated acreages are due to calculations made from various maps, some of which are not reliable, different ways of recording exchanges and transfers of property, etc.

Considerable difficulty and delay has been caused also by inaccurate topographic data. This has necessitated an unusual amount of checking in the field. It should be understood, therefore, that the areas, estimated costs, and contour map are all subject to correction.

We would recommend that this report be transmitted to the Park Commission and a joint meeting be held with that Commission for the final determination of boundaries and the mode of financing the areas acquired.

Acknowledgment is made of the valuable cooperation of the Chief Administrative Officer, the Director of Property and of the Park officials.

Very truly yours,



Gardner A. Dailey  
President

GAD:LBC







## I. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The original proposal was to create a large park in the southern part of the city in anticipation of a large future population. Reductions in the area have been made by the release or sale of level land for a housing project, reservoir sites, and institutions.
2. Areas which the Planning Commission would include in John McLaren Park are best for park purposes; areas excluded are generally more suitable for residential use. The boundary lines chosen will encourage the proper development of marginal private land.
3. The park is of city-wide importance because of its size and character but it can also serve surrounding neighborhoods if areas suitable for playground use are not excluded. The history of every large city shows a steady demand for park areas; this demand will increase as population grows in the southern section of San Francisco.
4. The park as now proposed (413 acres) has high scenic value and usability. If developed with native trees and plants it will be economical to maintain, and as attractive as Golden Gate Park. Concessions can help maintain it.
5. The area and boundaries of the Park should now be permanently fixed, so that both park and neighboring residential development may proceed without further uncertainty.
6. Suitable parkway approaches should be built to make the park more accessible from all parts of the city.
7. Estimates of areas and costs are summarized below:

<u>Areas</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Original proposal, 1926	550
Park Commission reduction, 1932	428
Park Commission recommendation, July, 1944	374 <sup>o</sup> (361)
Board of Supervisors proposal, September, 1944	283 <sup>o</sup> (271)
Planning Commission recommendation, November, 1944	413 <sup>o</sup>
Total area acquired to date	
(within Park Commission 1944 Boundary, excluding streets)	222
Total cost of land acquired	\$720,000

### Estimated Costs

Park Commission, net purchase area 80 acres (\$25,000 deducted for 10 acres to be sold)	\$325,000
Board of Supervisors, net purchase area 36 acres (\$66,000 deducted for 26 acres to be sold)	\$84,000
Planning Commission, net purchase area 106 acres (\$25,000 deducted for 10 acres to be sold)	\$443,000

- <sup>o</sup> Planning Commission's calculations; those in parenthesis are from the Director of Property.



## II HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Arguments over the boundaries of John McLaren Park have been almost continuous for the past eighteen years. In July, 1944 the Finance Committee of the Board of Supervisors recommended that the park area be reduced to 271 acres from the Park Department's most recent proposal of 361 acres.

At the meeting of the Board of Supervisors, September 11, 1944, the boundary question was referred to the City Planning Commission. The Commission was directed to make a report and recommendation to the Board concerning the size of the Park and its relation to the Master Plan of San Francisco.

Original Proposals. According to information supplied by the Director of Property, the Board of Supervisors, on October 4, 1926, adopted Resolution No. 26241, New Series, approved October 15, 1926, authorizing the acquisition of property by eminent domain proceedings for a public park, to be known as Mission Park, in the area lying South of Silver Avenue and East of La Grande Avenue. The proceedings were never instituted by the City Attorney as sufficient funds were not available for acquiring all the property.

The proposed park was officially designated as John McLaren Park by Resolution of the Board of Supervisors on November 29, 1926, in appreciation of John McLaren's services to the city.

In 1927 all the property within the proposed park area was appraised for the City by outside appraisers and title reports were obtained.

At an election held on November 6, 1928 a proposal for the City to purchase, develop and equip the park by incurring a bonded debt of \$2,000,000 was voted down. The area of the proposed park at that time was 550 acres. This area is indicated on the Property and Boundary Map, Plate 1, and is referred to as the original boundary.

Following defeat of the bond proposal, the City began the gradual purchase of properties for the park. By November, 1944, a total of about 222 acres had been acquired at a total cost of about \$720,000 including the cost of appraisals and title reports.

Revisions in Boundaries. The originally planned park area of 550 acres was reduced to 428 acres in 1932 by the Park Commission, and later to 361 acres (374 acres according to Planning Commission calculations).

Large areas were taken from within the original boundaries for the School and Convent of the Good Shepherd of San Francisco, the Lick Home, two reservoirs of the San Francisco Water Department, the Sunnydale Housing Project and Crocker Amazon Playground.





This playground is on Water Department property which was originally intended for reservoir purposes.

At the present time the Board of Supervisors proposes a reduction to 271 acres; the Park Department proposes a minimum of 361 acres. These various boundaries are shown on Plate 1.

### III. PARK DEVELOPMENT IN SAN FRANCISCO

Needs, Present and Prospective. San Francisco is confined by nature and its corporate boundaries to a limited area. The result is an intensive use of land, increasing population density and higher land costs. For these and other reasons the need for adequate public recreation areas within this city is great.

San Francisco stands high among other large cities in the proportion of the total area provided for recreation to the population, with four acres of public park and recreation space for each 1000 persons. But the distribution of this space is not ideal as certain parts of the city are inadequately served. Plate 2 - "Land Used for Recreation" - shows this, and clearly indicates the need for a large park in the southern portion of the city. Recognition of this need led, in 1926, to the proposal for John McLaren Park.

### IV. DESCRIPTION OF PARK SITE AND SUGGESTED DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Before the boundaries and size of John McLaren Park can be fixed, several factors should be considered. Among these are: What is the natural form and character of the area and its suitability for park uses? What are the possible alternative uses? What is the purpose of the park? What areas should it serve? How should it be developed? What is the relation to other parks and playgrounds in San Francisco and to the Master Plan in general? What relative advantages, present and potential would result from a severe reduction of the park area, or the abandonment of the park entirely? What is best for the citizens of future San Francisco?

Natural Character of The Land. The site is a natural one for a large park. It consists of two high, slightly ridges, one reaching a maximum elevation of 540 feet. From the six major hilltops, as well as from the ridges, unexcelled views of San Francisco and the Bay are to be had. At lower elevations a few gently sloping or level areas are suitable for playgrounds and active games and sports. In the area originally designated for the park, there were many such slopes, perhaps equivalent to 40% of the entire park area. Usable areas within the boundaries



proposed by the Park Department now amount to only 15%.

Relation of The Park to The City. The terrain offers many fine viewpoints to the Bay, the distant hills of San Francisco, and the skyline of the main business section. These high spots make the area attractive and useful to people throughout the entire city and to visitors. A park can be developed at this point which will also serve the recreational needs of the surrounding neighborhoods. To have local utility, however, the park must be something more than a series of barren, steep hillsides.

Parkway Approaches and Connections. In order to be of value to the city as a whole John McLaren Park should be made easily accessible, not merely by adequate street approaches but by a parkway system connecting this large recreational area with others in the city. These parkways would make accessible certain unique features in John McLaren Park that are not to be found in Golden Gate Park nor in any other in the city. Because of the size and character of the Park site, an extensive system of scenic driveways within the Park can be developed. These driveways would serve as part of a complete city-wide system of parkways.

One parkway link about two miles long could be planned to connect John McLaren Park with the Lake Merced area and Golden Gate Park (see accompanying map, "Suggested Parkway Connections", Plate 3). One section of this, the extension of Stanley Drive, under Junipero Serra Boulevard, from the Lake Merced Area to Alemany Boulevard is proposed by the Department of Public Works in the Postwar Improvement Program.

A second parkway approach should connect John McLaren Park with Bayshore Boulevard. It is proposed that this be done on Woolsey Street; the connection may eventually be carried to Bayview Park.

A third Parkway should approach John McLaren Park from Silver Avenue on the North by widening and improvement of University Street.

Type of Park Development. The development of John McLaren Park should be in keeping with the natural character of the site. It would be a mistake to try to make this area like Golden Gate Park. It should be designed and planted to maintain as much of the native California landscape as possible. An outstanding example of this type of park is Tilden Park in the East Bay Regional Park system.

With careful determination of the boundaries and best use of the natural scenic resources McLaren Park can become an outstanding tourist attraction in the City. Because of the high percentage of sunny days in this southeast part of the city, the park would prove a valuable alternate to Golden Gate Park, the





Zoological Gardens, the Museums and other units of the San Francisco park system. The City does not lose by giving its visitors more to see, more places to visit, more things to do. During the six-year period prior to 1941 it is estimated that an average of 950,000 out-of-state visitors spent \$35,000,000 annually in the Bay Region, mainly, in San Francisco. But from three to five times this much goes to Southern California because of our indifference to these potential revenues.

Suggested Development Plan. A suggested general plan has been prepared to indicate the primary features of a first-class park development in this part of the city. The boundaries depend to a considerable extent upon the slopes, marginal development outside the park and the improvements considered desirable for the park. The original plan prepared in 1928 included an 18-hole golf course. Since the area has been reduced and golf courses have been provided elsewhere in the city, it would seem more important to develop other attractions. Among those obviously appropriate in a park of this size and type are:

1. Scenic drives and viewpoints.
2. Bridle trails with riding stables as a concession.
3. Foot paths and overlook structures.
4. Picnic and barbecue areas.
5. At least three areas for active play and use by surrounding neighborhoods.
6. An outdoor theatre.
7. A refreshment pavilion with a view terrace.
8. An archery range.
9. A youth camping area.
10. Planting - native trees, shrubs, wildflowers.

The ultimate landscape effect in the park, to be achieved in 20 or 30 years, would be comparable with the natural woodlands of San Mateo County. It would be a rich green landmark in the southern section of the city, a pleasing background for the tightly-built areas of small homes.

Wherever possible the boundary of the park should follow natural geographic lines, bringing within the park areas best adapted to park use and leaving out of the park land suitable for good residential use. Streets and property lines obviously must be followed in acquiring property to avoid remnants. The boundary as proposed will permit development of private property facing a boundary street around most of the perimeter of the park. Such a boundary street will encourage desirable residential building, increase the value of property facing the park, and facilitate movement of traffic around and into the park





As shown on the accompanying "Suggested Development Plan" Plate 5, it is proposed that connections to certain streets in the vicinity of Hahn and Campbell Streets be replatted in order to relate both private holdings and the park itself to the park boundary and topography.

It is believed that no necessity exists for a severe reduction of park area in order to provide residential sites. The record shows a great reluctance on the part of builders to utilize steep slopes of the kind now included in McLaren Park. A number of hills in the immediate vicinity of and outside the Park remain unused. (See Plate 4 - Vacant Land - 1944). The Planning Commission believes a park of approximately 413 acres necessary to assure control of land essentially more valuable for park than for other purposes. This conclusion is based upon a long look into the future, a firm belief in the greatness of this City.

In 1905 it was proposed to subdivide Central Park in New York into building lots, but the plan was abandoned because of public protest. The wisdom of maintaining Central Park in one single recreational area has been proven as the surrounding land has been more intensively built upon. San Francisco must wisely look ahead and plan generously for its future population, and for greatly increased leisure time needs.

An area east of Cambridge Street and just north of Woolsey Street which would be usable for residential development has been included within the park boundaries in order to give the park a limited amount of fairly level land. This area is in the section most protected from the ocean winds and fog and therefore the warmest. The land here is gently sloping, and is the only large area that can be developed with tennis courts, swimming pool and similar facilities to serve the people living on the north side of the ridge which separates them from the Crocker-Amazon Playground.

Areas Omitted. It is proposed to omit two areas which were included by the Park Commission:

1. The two blocks bounded by Woolsey, Colby, Olmstead and University Streets, comprising about 6 acres, were excluded as more suitable for residential development. University Street then becomes a logical boundary for the park.
2. The triangular area bounded by Elliot and Raymond Streets and the base of the hill at the southeast corner of the park comprising about 11 acres is excluded for residential use.

Areas Added. Areas added to the boundary proposed by the Park Commission are as follows:

1. The four portions of blocks comprising about 7 acres, adjacent and south of the Convent and the Lick Home. These areas if used for residential development would break the continuity between the public park area and the



semi-public uses which are park-like in character. A small group of dwellings on those portions of blocks would be isolated from other housing. The cost of providing sewers and public utilities would be excessive for such a small residential development. This area is essential in order to add sufficient level land for active play for the neighborhoods on this side of the park.

2. The boundary across the easterly end of the main ridge in the park was extended to Bowdoin and Ervine Streets in order to make possible the use of this hilltop as a viewpoint. From this point may be seen some of the best views of the city and the Bay. If the boundary were to remain as proposed by the Park Department residences could be built along the boundary on the hilltop, cutting off the view and destroying the development possibilities of this unusual site. Most of this area, which comprises about 20 acres, is too steep for residential development, particularly for row houses on 25-foot lots.
3. Two portions of blocks west of Hahn Street and north of Leland Avenue, comprising about 3 acres, were included in the park in order to use Hahn Street as the boundary of the park rather than the rear of dwelling lots.
4. The small portion of city land on Hahn Street north of Sunnydale Avenue was included for the reasons given above.
5. The portion of land, comprising about 9 acres, lying north of Brookdale and Geneva Avenues was added in order to include an entire hill within the park, and to use the two above mentioned streets as the park boundary. Furthermore, this strip of land is very steep and would be useless for building purposes.
6. The blocks bounded by Excelsior, Moscow, Athens and Peru Streets, comprising about 14 acres, were included as essential to the proper development of this northwest corner of the park. Here the proposed boundary follows the natural contours and includes two important viewpoints. The boundary following La Grande Avenue proposed by the Park Department cuts directly across the knoll where the best view may be had, and excludes property which would be too steep for desirable residential development.





7. The small triangular area of 1.4 acres bounded by Brazil, Prague and La Grande Streets along the westerly boundary of the park was included because it would be uneconomical to develop the point of the triangle for residential use. A street on both sides of the triangle would seem to be unnecessary. The addition of this triangle to the park would make it possible to eliminate the hump in the paved roadway of Brazil Street between Prague and La Grande Streets which now makes a bad approach to the Brazil Avenue entrance to the park.

## VI. RESIDENTIAL USES IN SURROUNDING AREA

Certain residential areas adjacent to the park, particularly those on the hilly section to the east, have developed in a scattered, haphazard manner. It is recommended that these areas be replatted for new development after the boundaries of the park have been finally determined.

Urban redevelopment legislation may provide an instrument for removing the undesirable dwellings and rebuilding the area according to improved standards of site planning and subdivision design. Contour streets should replace those streets which have been platted on grades impracticable and unsafe for vehicular traffic. In some cases these grades are as high as 30% and 35%.

## VII. COST OF LAND ACQUISITION

The proposed Planning Commission boundary will include approximately 413 acres, of which 222 acres have been purchased at a cost of \$720,000, including appraisals and title reports. For an additional expenditure of \$468,000 the balance of 191 acres can be acquired. However, the cost will be reduced by \$25,000 from the salvage value of city-owned parcels to be sold outside of the Planning Commission boundary; thus making the net cost about \$443,000.

## VIII. PLAN OF ACTION

It is suggested that the following steps be taken to carry the plans for John McLaren Park to completion:

1. Establishment of official boundaries by resolution of the Board of Supervisors.
2. Adoption by Board of Supervisors of schedule of land acquisition to be carried out by Real Estate Department. In the Preliminary Six-Year Program for Postwar Improvements, the sum of \$500,000 has been included for the purchase of land in John McLaren Park.



3. Preparation of a reliable boundary and topographic survey of all property included within the official boundary. Present topographic data has been enlarged from U.S. Geodetic Survey Maps and is inaccurate. The cost of such a survey would be reasonably small and would be a justifiable expenditure to assure the preparation of a sound development plan.
4. Preparation of a final development plan of park and related areas should be authorized. Cost of the plan could be covered by the \$50,000 provided for in the Postwar Improvement Program. In the event of a shortage of Park Department personnel, the plan might be prepared in competition among the landscape architects in San Francisco. Both the plan and competition would have high publicity value in the local and national press.
5. Adoption of an official development plan by Board of Park Commissioners. This will indicate a large volume of useful work to be undertaken in a period of slack private employment.
6. Budgeting of funds for the postwar construction program is desirable; \$200,000 has been included for this purpose in the Six-Year Program for Postwar Improvement.
7. Replatting of boundary streets immediately adjacent to park by joint action of the Department of Public Works, the Park Commission and the Planning Commission. These changes should be made by the city to provide a boundary street for the park, and to encourage new residential development, by providing better access to building sites.





